

THIS MONTH

ATI's chipsets have never been as well regarded as Intel's or Nvidia's, but now the graphics card company is owned by AMD it's hoping its fortunes will change. In our components section we've got a motherboard that uses the company's first chipset under the AMD brand, the AMD 690G. A budget chipset, it offers HDCP-compliant outputs, so it's perfect for building a media centre PC.

With viruses now posing a bigger threat than ever, Microsoft has decided to offer its own protection with its Windows Live OneCare package. We've put it through the same in-depth and punishing tests that we used for our recent anti-virus labs test and you can read how well it did in our Software section on page 48.

We've got the first two PC-less, DECT Skype phones that can also plug into your existing landline in our Networks section. These are the perfect way to use Skype's new subscription Skype Pro service.

Finally, with the cheapest HD TV we've ever seen, Panasonic's new ultra-zoom camera and Sony Ericsson's new Walkman phone, we have something for you no matter what your budget or interest.

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor

david@computershopper.co.uk



CYBERPOWER Infinity 970 Crossfire

★★★

£1,355 inc VAT

With a dual-core processor, 2GB of memory, two hard disks and two graphics cards, CyberPower's Infinity 970 Crossfire PC seems to have two of everything. Its looks are a matter of taste, though, with a brash red and black case that is illuminated with blue lights. The computer we reviewed came with a tacky transfer on the side of the case, but this won't be on the final system design.

The Infinity is fitted with two ATI Radeon X1950 Pro graphics cards, which can be used in tandem to improve 3D performance. Unlike earlier CrossFire cards, the X1950s are linked together by two small connectors inside the case instead of a chunky external cable.

This PC made short work of our Call of Duty 2 test, scoring a blistering 66.5fps. However, its results in our Prey benchmark were identical whether CrossFire was enabled or not. After finishing our other benchmarks, we replaced Windows Vista with Windows XP and re-ran the test. Even then, we had to disable Catalyst AI in ATI's Catalyst Control Center software before we saw a performance improvement over a single X1950 card. Only then did the Infinity score an impressive 83.6fps in our Prey test.

This computer should have no trouble playing the most demanding and detailed games, but our experience suggests you'll have to wait for updated graphics card drivers if you want the best performance in all games with Vista. At some point you may also have to upgrade your graphics cards if you want to play upcoming games that rely on DirectX 10, which the Radeon X1950 Pro doesn't support.

The Infinity may be a gaming PC, but its high specification makes it adept at other tasks,

This month What's New Contents



PC Systems page 10

CyberPower Infinity 970 Crossfire	★★★
Evesham Solar Storm Plus	★★★★
Mesh Elite E6600 GTS	★★★★
PC Nextday Zoostorm 2-3305 Versatile PC	★★★★
Sony VGX-XL301	★★★★

Notebooks page 16

Apple MacBook	★★★★
Asus A8JR	★★★★
HP Compaq NX9420	★★★
HP Pavilion dv9292EU	★★★★
PC Nextday Zoostorm 53-7701 Family Laptop	★★★★
Sony Vaio VGN-FE41E	★★★★



Handhelds page 22

Acer c530 GPS	★★★★
Archos 404 Camcorder	★★★★
Navicore Personal 2007	★★★★
Sony Ericsson K800i	★★★★
Sony Ericsson W880i	★★★★
TomTom One Regional	★★★★

Printers & Scanners page 24

Canon i-SENSYS LBP5300	★★
Canon PIXMA iP4300	★★★★
Canon PIXMA MP160	★★★★
Dell Multifunction Laser Printer 1815dn	★★★★
Epson Perfection 4490 Photo	★★★★
HP Photosmart D7160	★★★★
Konica Minolta Magicolor 2500W	★★★★
Plustek OfficeSmart PL806	★★★
Samsung ML-2510	★★★★
Xerox Phaser 6180N	★★★



Displays page 28

Dell 1800MP	★★★★
Hitachi Illumina PJ-TX300	★★★★
Iiyama X486S-B1	★★★★
LG 32LC2D	★★★★
LG Flatron L1900J	★★★
Mirai DTL-522P201	★
Samsung 215TW	★★★★

Photography page 30

Canon EOS 400D	★★★★
Canon PowerShot A630	★★★★
Fujifilm FinePix F20 Zoom	★★★★
Fujifilm FinePix S6500fd Zoom	★★★★
Olympus SP-550 UZ	★★
Panasonic DMC-FZ8	★★★★
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX3	★★★★
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ50	★★★★
Pentax Optio M30	★★★





too. With a powerful Core 2 Duo E6600 processor and 2GB of RAM, it raced through our video-encoding, image-editing and multitasking tests. The Infinity 970 Crossfire will easily handle demanding applications, including high-resolution photo editing and HD video editing.

We were surprised to discover that the regular-aspect, 19in ViewSonic monitor has only a D-sub input, as both of the graphics cards have only DVI ports, but CyberPower does include a suitable adaptor. Though the monitor's white reproduction looked greyish, we were impressed by its bright colours and smooth transitions in our greyscale and colour gradient tests.

The Infinity contains two 160GB hard disks, which are configured to form a single 320GB RAID 0 array. This speeds up disk access, but if either disk fails you'll lose the data stored on both. This makes it

especially important to keep a regular backup. You can use the computer's DVD drive to copy data to multiple discs, or invest in another large hard disk or backup device.

The Infinity has plenty of internal space that makes it easy to add more disks or other devices. There are no fewer than six free 3½in drive bays and three additional

5¼in drive bays. There are two PCI slots, although one of them is pressed up against a graphics card, making installation a tight fit. The computer's 800W power supply will cope with any conceivable upgrade.

The Infinity 970 Crossfire is a powerful, generously specified PC. However, Mesh's cheaper Elite E6600 GTs, reviewed on page 13, is a better-value gaming PC, if not quite as powerful. As the Elite E6600 also has a DirectX graphics card it will be able to play compatible games when they're released.

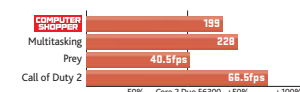
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in Windows and games
- ✓ Lots of memory
- ✗ Monitor has no DVI inputs

DESKTOP PC 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6600, 2GB RAM, 2x 160GB hard disks, 2x 256MB ATI Radeon X1950 Pro, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 19in LCD
SUPPLIER CyberPower 0800 019 0863
DETAILS www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



PC SYSTEMS

FAQ

Q I want a mini PC. Is there any advantage in building one myself?

A Building your own mini PC is often cheaper than buying one from a manufacturer. You'll have more control over the size and type of chassis and you'll get to pick the exact specifications, so you can opt for the latest components or use parts cannibalised from an existing computer. If your mini PC stops working, however, or you can't get it to work in the first place, you'll have to diagnose the problem and repair or replace the faulty component yourself.

If you don't have a lot of spare time or technical knowledge, buying a ready-made mini PC is easier and less stressful. If something goes wrong, you have a manufacturer's warranty and a single, convenient source of support rather than several resellers or manufacturers to chase around. Moreover, some manufacturers use certain small and stylish cases that can't be bought anywhere else.

Alan Lu
PC systems and storage expert



alan@computershopper.co.uk



Video page 34

Freecom DVB-T USB Stick	★★★★
Humax Duovision PVR-9200T	★★★★★
Panasonic HDC-SD1	★★★★
Pinnacle Moviebox USB	★★★★
Sling Media Slingbox	★★★★★
Terratec Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity	★★★★★
Terratec Grabster AV400 MKII	★★★★

Audio page 36

Apple iPod Shuffle	★★★★★
Behringer iXa 393 USB Guitar	★★★★
iSymphony M2	★★★★★
Logitech AudioStation	★★★★★
Logitech Z-5450	★★★★★
Philips SLA520	★★★★★
SanDisk Sansa c250	★★★★
SanDisk Sansa e270	★★★★★
Sony NW-S706F	★★★★★

Networks page 38

Devolo DLAN 200 Avdesk Starter Kit	★★★★★
D-Link DPR-1260	★★★★
Netgear SPH200D	★★★★★
Philips Dual Phone VOIP 321	★★★★★
Philips VOIPB41	★★★★★

Storage page 40

HP dvd940e	★★★★★
HP MediaVault MV2010	★★★★
Lite On SSM-85H5SX	★★★★
Maxtor Shared Storage II 1TB	★★★★★
Samsung SuperWritemaster SH-S182M	★★★★★
Storage Depot DVD Multiformat Combo	★★★★
Western Digital Passport 120GB	★★★★★

Components page 42

Antec P150	★★★★★
BFG PhysX Accelerator	★★★★
ECS AMD690GM-M2	★★★★★
Foxconn WinFast MCP61SM2MA	★★★★★
Gigabyte GV-RX195P	★★★★★
Intel Core 2 Duo E6700	★★★★★
MSI G965MDH	★★★★★
Sapphire Radeon X1550	★★★★★
Shuttle XPC SD32G2	★★★★★
Shuttle XPC SD39P2	★★★★★
Zerothrm CF800	★★★★★

Software & Games page 46

Arma: Armed Assault	★★
ArtRage 2	★★★★★
Avanquest RadioTracker 2	★★★★★
Cakewalk Sonar 6 Producer Edition	★★★★★
Cloudmark Desktop for Outlook	★★★★★
Maelstrom	★★★
Company of Heroes	★★★★★
Corel Painter X	★★★★★
CyberLink PowerCinema 5 Digital TV Edition	★★★★
Diskeeper 2007 Home	★★★★★
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	★★★★★
FIFA 2007	★★★★★
FlatOut 2	★★★★★
Laplink PCmover	★★★
Magix Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL	★★★★★
Magix Photos on CD & DVD 6	★★
Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2007	★★★★★
Microsoft Windows Live OneCare	★★
Microsoft Works Suite 2006	★★★★★
Mr Site Takeaway Website	★★★★★
Roxio Easy Media Creator 9 Suite	★★★★★
Serif PagePlus X2	★★★★★
The Sims: Life Stories	★★★
Sony Vegas Movie Studio +DVD	★★★★★
Platinum Edition 6	★★★★★
Steganos AntiVirus 2007	★★★★★
Supreme Commander	★★★★★
THQ S.T.A.L.K.E.R.	★★

BYTE SIZE

MICROSOFT HABU

★★★★★
£36 inc VAT



The Habu is a good combination of Razer's laser mouse technology with an excellent Microsoft design.

The maximum sensitivity is 2,000dpi, but you can alter this. Microsoft supplies two panels fitted with back and forwards navigation buttons placed slightly differently on each. You can pick the configuration you like, but it doesn't make much difference and seems over-engineered. The Habu is comfortable to use and moves effortlessly on its low-friction feet. You can store different profiles with custom sensitivity and button operation for each game.

Saitek's Gaming Mouse is better value, but the Habu is more configurable and slightly more comfortable.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.microsoft.com

MOUSETRAPPER MouseTrapper Advance

★★★
£200 inc VAT

This unusual device is built into a wrist rest and is designed to help prevent and relieve repetitive strain injury (RSI).

It looks a bit like a standard track pad, but the surface moves beneath your finger. It's accurate and gives more feedback than a standard touch pad.

The scrolling surface moves far enough to handle 1,280x1,024 displays. Those with high-resolution, or multiple, monitors may find themselves reaching the edge of the MouseTrapper's range, at which point the cursor dashes to the edge of the screen.

MouseTrapper generally works very well, but it's extremely expensive and may not help to relieve RSI symptoms in all sufferers.

Seth Barton

SUPPLIER Mousetrappor 01428 724301
DETAILS www.mousetrappor.co.uk



SONY Vaio VGX-XL301

★★★★★
£1,050 inc VAT

We've reviewed many expensive Sony PCs, but at £1,050 the VGX-XL301 media centre PC is competitively priced. It looks smart, feels sturdy and is very quiet, so you won't be distracted by loud cooling fans when watching movies or listening to music. That said, it isn't much smaller than a regular midi-tower PC, so it's more obtrusive than some other media centre PCs we've reviewed.

Unusually, this computer has two hybrid TV tuners, each capable of receiving analogue or digital broadcasts. You can use them to record one channel while you watch another. The PC comes with Windows Vista Home Premium, which includes Media Center. Using the supplied remote control you can browse your library of recorded shows, as well as music and photos. A cordless keyboard with a built-in touch pad is also included. While the keyboard keys and the touch pad feel responsive, the small touch pad and its buttons feel cramped.

The 250GB hard disk provides enough space for a sizable collection of media files, but if you plan to use the VGX-XL301 as your main PC, you may find you need more room for programs and documents. You can add another internal SATA disk, although the cramped interior makes this tricky. Alternatively, an external disk can be added to one of the four USB2 or three FireWire ports.

With an Intel Core 2 Duo E6300 processor and 2GB of RAM, the VGX-XL301 is capable of handling demanding tasks such as video and photo editing. It's also capable of playing 3D games, such as Prey



or Call of Duty 2, but you'll have to lower the graphical detail settings or the resolution for a smooth frame rate. You could replace the 7600GTL graphics card with a more powerful model, but there isn't much room inside the cramped case for a card with a large fan.

There are plenty of ports for your audio and video equipment, including an HDMI socket and a component video output for connecting high-definition TVs. You can connect a surround-sound amplifier to the optical or coaxial S/PDIF ports, while S-video and composite video inputs allow you to record footage from sources such as a VCR. The VGX-XL301 doesn't come with a monitor, though, and there's no DVI or D-sub port so you'll need an HDMI to DVI cable to connect one.

The computer's smart case lacks any free PCI slots or 5¼in drive bays, but its plentiful extras mean you're unlikely to need either. A memory card reader, wireless networking and the receivers from the remote and cordless keyboard are built in. Sony's generous software bundle includes useful titles such as Adobe Premiere Elements and Photoshop Elements.

Sony's VGX-XL301 is a great media centre PC with quick Windows performance, dual hybrid TV tuners and an extensive set of features and software. With a bigger hard disk, it would be perfect.

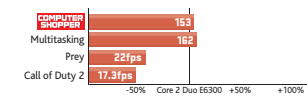
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Two hybrid TV tuners
- ✓ Generous software bundle
- ✗ Small hard disk

MEDIA CENTRE PC 1.86GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6300, 2GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7600GTL, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 2x hybrid TV tuners
PART CODE VGX-XL301.CEK
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.sony.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



Also consider...

PC NEXTDAY Zoostorm 2-3305 Versatile PC

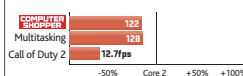
★★★★★
£518 inc VAT

You might expect a dual-core PC with Vista Home Premium to be expensive, but PC Nextday's Zoostorm 2-3305 Versatile PC shows that this doesn't have to be the case.

This Zoostorm comes with Vista Home Premium and an Intel Pentium D processor for under £520. The computer attained respectable scores in our video-encoding and image-editing tests. Its GeForce 7600GS graphics card is capable of displaying the transparent graphical effects in Vista's Aero interface, but it isn't ideal for playing the latest games. The 17in monitor displayed



DESKTOP PC 2.8GHz Intel Pentium D 820, 1GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7600GS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17in LCD
SUPPLIER sales@pcnextday.co.uk
DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk
✓ Inexpensive ✓ Generous specification includes Vista Home Premium
FULL REVIEW May 2007



white areas with a grey tinge, so it isn't too good for advanced photo-editing work.

The 2-3305 includes a PCI card that provides 802.11g wireless networking, a useful and welcome addition. Extras such as this, a low price and a fast dual-core processor are all reasons to like the 3305. It's very affordable for a decent PC with Vista.

MESH

Elite E6600 GTS

★★★★★

£999 inc VAT



Mesh's Elite E6600 GTS shows that gaming PCs fitted with the latest graphics cards don't have to be overly expensive. It's the first PC we've seen to come with a GeForce 8800 GTS, one of Nvidia's two new DirectX 10-compatible graphics chips, but it costs under £1,000.

The 320MB GeForce 8800 GTS card is less powerful than the range-topping 8800GTX processor, but it still made short work of our 3D graphics tests. It blitzed through our Call of Duty 2 test at 56.8fps and raced ahead in our Prey benchmark with a score of 61.3fps. It should have no trouble playing the latest graphically demanding games, including upcoming DirectX 10-dependent titles.

We were also impressed with this computer's performance in our application benchmarks. It worked swiftly through our image-editing and video-encoding tests. With slower RAM, it isn't quite as fast as CyberPower's similarly specified Infinity 970 Crossfire (reviewed on page 10), but it's more than fast enough for all but the most demanding of users.

Mesh supplies the Elite E6600 GTS with a 19in Hanns.G monitor. This isn't widescreen, so it isn't ideal for watching movies. It has limited tilt adjustment, but it can be swivelled effortlessly. Colours are bright and the screen is evenly lit, although there was some subtle banding in our greyscale and colour transition tests. The computer's cordless keyboard and mouse are fine for casual use, although gamers and serious typists may find the spongy keys tiresome.

The Creative Inspire T6100 surround-sound speakers are good enough for movies and gaming, but



aren't well suited to music. They have a lot of bass, but sound woolly and muffled overall. A better set of speakers would reveal the high sound quality of the computer's Creative X-Fi sound card. This provides realistic effects in games that support EAX processing; however, this PC comes with Windows Vista Home Premium, so you'll need to apply a patch to get EAX working. You can read more about this at <http://preview.creativelabs.com/alchemy>.

Keen gamers can add a second SLI graphics card for even better performance, although a double-height card would prevent the use of the spare PCI slot. As it is, the 8800GTS card's thick heatsink makes it a

squeeze to use the PCI Express x4 slot. There are seven USB2 ports for plugging in external peripherals, though. There's more room inside the Infinity 970 Crossfire, but with two spare 3½in drive bays and two 5¼in bays this PC has room for adding more storage.

Mesh's Elite E6600 GTS is a powerful gaming PC with a quality graphics processor and sound card. With a decent quality monitor and fast Windows performance, it's also a capable general-purpose PC. It's also great value, so it wins a Best Buy award.

Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in Windows and games
- ✓ Good value
- ✓ X-Fi sound card

MEDIA CENTRE PC 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6600, 2GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 320MB Nvidia GeForce 8800 GTS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 19in LCD
SUPPLIER www.meshcomputers.com
DETAILS Mesh 08447 360440

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



EVESHAM

Solar Storm Plus

★★★★★

£1,049 inc VAT

Evesham's Solar Storm Plus PC has something for almost everyone. It's well specified, with a generous amount of RAM and a mid-range Intel Core 2 Duo processor.

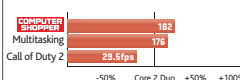
With more than enough power for everyday Windows applications, even memory- and processor-intensive jobs should be well within its capabilities. The 7900GS graphics card shouldn't have any trouble playing current 3D games, either, although you'll need to lower the resolution or graphical detail for the highest frame rates on very demanding titles.

You can use the Storm's dual digital TV tuner to record one channel while watching another. The



DESKTOP PC 2.13GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6400, 2GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7900GS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 20in widescreen LCD
SUPPLIER Evesham 08701 609500

DETAILS www.evesham.com
✓ Dual digital TV tuner with good display
✗ Pricier than the competition
FULL REVIEW May 2007



widescreen monitor's 1,680x1,050-pixel resolution is ideal for working on panoramic photos or for comparing documents side by side. It can also be swivelled effortlessly.

The Solar Storm Plus is fast in Windows and when playing games, has a good-quality, high-resolution display and a dual TV tuner, so it's perfect for a wide range of users.

BYTE SIZE

AM

OneClean Screen Cleaner

★★★★★

£12 inc VAT



The plastic screens on LCDs can easily be scratched and damaged by traditional cleaning products.

AM's OneClean Screen Cleaner takes a more delicate approach.

It comprises a 30ml spray containing an alcohol-free cleaning fluid, and a microfibre sponge that won't scratch. Cleaning is as simple as spraying your screen when it's cold and wiping it.

We tested it on a badly marked LCD. All the grime came away without leaving a smear. The sponge can be turned around when it gets grimy or replaced for £5.99. Replacement cleaner costs £4.99. The OneClean is a great way to clean your LCD monitor or TV without damaging it.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.clearly-av.co.uk
DETAILS www.am-denmark.com

AG NEOVO AV10

★★★★★

£132 inc VAT



AG Neovo's 7in AV10 is a neat digital photo frame. It has 128MB of memory and can also read pictures from CompactFlash or SD memory cards. The AV10 will scale down pictures to its native resolution of 800x480 and it can stretch digital pictures from their 4:3 aspect ratio to fill the 16:9 screen. This distorts them, though, so we'd recommend cropping them to the correct size on a PC first.

The AV10's brilliant display is sharp and vibrant with very wide viewing angles. The screen can be configured to power on and off at certain times, and the battery lasts around an hour.

It might not be particularly stylish, but the AV10 has excellent image quality and is good value.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.rocate.co.uk
DETAILS www.ag-neovo.com

BYTE SIZE



JOYTECH Control Center 540C

★★★★★
£60 inc VAT



The Control Center 540C lets you connect multiple sources to

your HD TV and switch between them. There's a dedicated Xbox 360 input and four sets of standard inputs. Each consists of component, S-video, composite, phono and optical S/PDIF inputs. You connect your TV and surround-sound amplifier to a set of matching outputs. It also has a five-port 10/100 Ethernet hub that lets you link PCs and games or media devices to your broadband router. This is a well-designed product at a great price.

Seth Barton

SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS www.joytech.net

GENIUS Look 320S

★★★★
£28 inc VAT

Genius's Look 320S is a tilt-and-swivel webcam about the size of a 35mm film canister. Its clever flip-out stand clips on a notebook screen, but it doesn't feel secure and won't fit thick monitors. An external microphone is included, as well as a soft carry case.

The 320S can record at a maximum of 30fps. It produced smooth video, but the image looked a little grainy and occasionally appeared washed out as it struggled to adjust to lighting changes. We were able to correct a slight red tint using the included software, although cryptic icons made this needlessly tricky to use.

The Look 320S is reasonably priced and produces decent-quality video, but its stand is poorly made.

Alan Lu

SUPPLIER www.looksale.co.uk
DETAILS www.geniusnet.co.uk

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR Intel Pentium D 820
MEMORY 1GB
HARD DISK 250GB
STORAGE 16x DVD writer
SOUND Integrated
SPEAKERS Stereo
GRAPHICS Integrated
MONITOR 19in LCD
EXTRAS 56K modem
CONNECTORS 4x USB2, network
SOFTWARE Windows Vista Home Premium
BASICS Keyboard, mouse
Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £500 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a no-no.

2 The size and shape of a PC is more important than it used to be. A mini PC costs a bit more and it's less upgradable, but it will take up less desk space and look much more attractive. If you're choosing a media centre PC, make sure you get one that fits in with any other electronic equipment in your living room and that it's quiet.

3 Interested in games? Upgrade to a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the GeForce 7300 GT graphics processor or Radeon X1600 will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today), you'll want anything up to a GeForce 7950 GX2 or Radeon X1900XTX.

Look for an SLI or CrossFire system if you want to use two graphics cards to get the best graphics performance. Even if you don't want SLI or CrossFire now, it may be worth getting a system that's capable of being upgraded later.

4 The processor above is powerful and it's dual core, so it will handle intensive tasks. If you're going to be doing a lot of video editing, you should consider upgrading to an even more powerful processor. Intel's Core 2 Duo range is our current top choice; as well as being more powerful, it needs less cooling so your PC should be quieter.

5 If you're not interested in games, you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor. If you'll be using your PC for serious desktop publishing, music or photo-editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of PC activities. To hear the surround

soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you. If you're not interested in games or DVDs (or you don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you're interested in music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 A 17in LCD is standard but not very exciting and quite small. A 19in LCD costs around £50 more and has the same resolution (1,280x1,024) but is easier on the eye. Twenty-inch LCDs are available from £300 and have a higher resolution (1,600x1,200). This makes them better for those who want to edit large photos, documents or spreadsheets.

If you're more interested in entertainment, consider a widescreen monitor. As well as being ideally suited for watching movies, they give you more room horizontally, so you can work on two documents side by side.

Decide if you want a glossy display or not. Glossy displays improve contrast and make images look brighter, but they reflect overhead lights and sunlight easily, which can be annoying.

8 The standard set of connectors can be improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port for fancy gadgets including most digital video (DV) cameras. Look for a memory card reader if you have a digital camera and make sure that your camera's memory card is supported.

9 Windows XP Home Premium is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never use it. But you may happen across a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for; you'll save lots of money by having it preloaded, although you won't get technical support included.

10 If you have money left over, consider a TV card. This lets you watch TV on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, or capture analogue video from a camcorder.

